

A BLACK CIVILIZATION

123 arose in which I could inquire directly of certain old men just what
842 the semen did when it entered the uterus of a woman. They all looked
114 at me with much contempt for my ignorance and informed me that
"that was what made babies." I had not been able to obtain this in-
formation earlier because the ordinary savage is far more interested
in the child's spiritual conception, which determines its place in the
social life of the people, than he is in the physiological mechanism of
conception. He would far rather talk about ritual and myth than
about ordinary mundane affairs. The relationship between the primi-
tive men of northeastern Arnhem Land and me as a field worker
would be the same as that between the colonial Puritans of Massa-
chusetts and the traditional visitor from Mars. Had the latter asked
Cotton Mather or any other member of the community "where babies
came from," he would have discovered that they came from heaven,
that God sent them, and that it was the special duty of the church to
look out for them. He might have been told that the stork brought
them, and discovered totemic "spiritual conception." He would have
been told this for approximately the same reason that the ordinary
anthropological field investigator is informed by the natives that the
totemic spirit is what causes impregnation.

I know it is dangerous to assume that, because the tribes I studied
knew about physiological conception, the people Spencer and Gillen
investigated had similar knowledge. I do feel, though, the necessity of
throwing doubt upon the validity of the conclusions reached by
Spencer and Gillen and others who claim there is no knowledge of
physiological conception among certain savage tribes. I think that pos-
sibly this knowledge does exist but is not considered important, the
spiritual conception of the child looming so large in native thinking
that the field worker obtains nothing but facts concerning the latter.¹¹

715 When a man dies he goes straight to his narra well. He is taken
there by his marikmo (paternal grandfather). He never comes back
• 5763 but always remains a spirit. Usually a Murngin who is about to die,
535 particularly if severely wounded in a spear fight, dances his death
dance, which is symbolical of the ceremonial actions of his totem.
This is to send his spirit back to his ranga well.

"We can drink that narra water; we can see the bottom of the well.

¹¹ This point perhaps has been labored by me, but a large number of sociological
and anthropological theories have been built out of the idea that there are many savage
peoples who are ignorant of the facts of procreation. It is time some check be placed
upon such speculation until further proof is accumulated by field workers.

THE LOCAL ORGANIZATION

25

That is nothing. That man is far down below in the deep water with his ranga, with his wongar and his old marikmo." 775

The soul of the dead (bir-im-bir) then returns to its totem and the totem lives in the sacred narra well. This is true for both men and women.

A Warumeri clansman was unconscious and near death. The relatives sang the garma sea-way (a cycle of songs about the sea and those totems which are connected with it). While they sang, it was thought, the spirit of marikmo was listening to the song. They then sang crayfish, which is a Warumeri totem. The hand of the dying one moved convulsively like a crayfish. They sang whale, also the clan's totem, and the person dying kicked in imitation of a whale. This meant he was going to die, and he was telling his people. He wanted them to sing his song, it was believed, so that his marikmo and old gatu (father's father's father) would know and come to him. 763 ● 533

The dying one stiffened and was quiet. He was dead according to tribal thought, although his heart beat. "I see that go," one relative said about the heart of the dying man, "and I knew he was dead, but that his marikmo was looking out for him. I could see that because that old man marikmo moved inside his heart. He was taking that spirit back to the Warumeri well." 763

After death and before the burial ceremony, the symbol of the narra well of the deceased is painted on his chest and abdomen—in this instance, the wild duck well. This is done in order that all the dead of the well can see the one who has just died and take him immediately away to his water hole. 764

When, during the Djungguan ceremony for the great snake, Yur-lunggur, and during the Narra ceremony for the other totemic emblems, a ranga is made, not only does the totem or the totem's essence enter into it through the singing of the men, but also the birimbir spirits of the dead ancestors—illustrating the close association of the clan members with their totems and dead ancestors. 776 778

The mythological ancestors who are in the well and who had some part in its formation are called old marikmo or old gatu. Their names express clearly the affiliation of the mythical men to the narra well and to the totem.

The names of the wells, as will be seen by examining the list of those belonging to the clans, pages 39-51, show the same totemic affiliation either directly or indirectly. Like the names of the mythological ancestors, they are of two types, the sacred and the camp variety. 778 103

THE FAMILY AND KINSHIP STRUCTURE

73

The marikmo-maraitcha reciprocation is far less powerful than the wawa-yukiyuko or bapa-gatu relationship. The female marikmo is seldom considered at all. A marikmo diramo is of more importance to a maraitcha diramo after death than before. It is largely because of this post-mortem relationship that the living tie is of importance.

A spirit child comes from the water hole of the clan where the spirit of the dead marikmo is. This marikmo takes a special interest in the unborn child. A maraitcha receives some of his names, including all his totemic names, from his marikmo diramo. A maraitcha mielk receives her names from her female marikmo and mari.

When a man dies, the spirit of his marikmo comes out of the well for him, and takes the dead man's good soul¹⁰ back to the well whence it had come as a spirit child. When a man lies dying, the spirit of marikmo (also mari) comes to his maraitcha and calls for the spirit to come out and join him. The natives believe that sometimes just as the man dies, while the heart is still beating, the marikmo's spirit enters the heart, and that is why the heart continues to beat. He then takes the soul of the dead man out of the heart and leaves for the other world through the dead man's mouth. Frequently, the spirit of a dead marikmo fights with the mokoi (the evil ghosts who live in jungles) for the spirit of the dead man, for they claim it as theirs. The father and others paint the body of the dead man or woman with the design of the totemic water hole and sing a totemic song so that marikmo can hear and lead his maraitcha to the totemic well and save it from the attacks of the mokoi.

When the bones are exhumed the women carry them for a time. A marikmo mielk helps in this, but her participation is small and of little importance.

A marikmo diramo has a claim on a man's canoe. Both male and female marikmo seem to acquire what powers they have because they are in the patrilineal line and are pale reflections of the father.

Mokul Bapa ↔ *Gatu* (diramo and mielk) (father's sister ↔ brother's child)

The varieties of mokul bapa correspond to those of bapa. The mokul bapa, say the natives, is a kind of female father. No taboos surround her relations with gatu except the ordinary restrictions between men and women of the same moiety. Gatu diramo looks upon her not only as a sister to his father, but also as a mother of his dué, a most important person.

¹⁰ Birinbir, warro; see Glossary of Native Terms.

WARFARE

179

"Well," said he, "it can't be helped. I can do nothing, for my son started it first." He collected his wives and belongings and said, "We will go now. I think this wound will kill me before I get home." 628

After they had walked for several days he felt too ill to continue his journey.

"When I die," he said, "you wives put me in my grave and go straight to Warlumbopo [his younger brother] and tell him what has happened to his elder brother."

Shortly after he had spoken, Warlumbopo walked into the dying man's camp. He cried and cried. Then the old man raised himself to a sitting position. He danced the dance of the black duck totem flying home, for he remembered his totemic water hole and he wanted his soul to go straight to it when it left his body, and then he fell back dead.⁵ 628 763 535

Warlumbopo said, "I won't show my sorrow now. I will go buy you back first, my brother." He did not bury his brother, and he told the wives of the deceased not to bury him. He picked up his spears and basket and went away. He went down to the Blue Mud Bay country where the Marderpa people had gone after his brother had left them. He went over to Woodah Island. It was daytime. 628

The Marderpa people saw him. They conferred together. "We must kill him too," they said. They got ready. Groote Eyelandt and Barlamomo people were also there. Warlumbopo walked straight into the camp as though nothing had happened. All the men of the camp hooked up their spears. "Why have you people got your spears hooked up? What is the matter?" He pretended he knew nothing.

"Haven't you heard anything?" someone said.

"No," he replied. "I have come down here to hunt for emu."

The old Marderpa man who had killed his brother sang the water of the Ritarngo well and the water of the Marderpa clan's well, then he said the dead man's name. "We killed him and his son," he said.

"Oh," said Warlumbopo, "and a good thing it was, too. He was a wakinu [without relatives and asocial]. I have a spear mark from him too." He showed a scar upon his leg (from an engagement with an enemy, not from his brother).

Warlumbopo painted himself for a makarata peacemaking ceremony, and so did the old men of the Marderpa group. They went out to the dueling ground. Two old men and two boys ran for Warlumbopo to throw his spears at them. He took the stone heads out of his spears and threw two shafts at them.

* All clansmen perform this death ceremony. A Wangurri would dance and call out his Garawark, the son of Barrimundi; and a Lialaomir man would dance the great python and imitate the thunder of his totem.

761 and make a living man more like the dead. A man goes to sleep be-
 775 cause a bone has been put in the fire by him and he is killed by his
 778 enemies (see the account of a clan feud in the war chapter). A man
 765 cannot run when chased by his enemies because one of them is blowing
 on a dead man's bone in his mouth, or an evil soul enters a man's head
 and makes him crazy, the power of the soul coming from that of the
 dead.

778 The two classes, that of the totem and of the dead, are but two vari-
 775 eties of one general type, for both of them belong to the world of the
 sacred. Their power is contagious and dangerous unless properly
 handled by ritual. The totem can cause sickness and death just as the
 power of the dead can produce these same effects.

*The Behavior of the Individual and the Society When Magic Is Put
 into Effect*

764 The isolation of the various elements in the particular social con-
 figuration surrounding the death of a victim of black magic may help
 illuminate the fundamental nature of Murngin magic and explain its
 potency and unusual effectiveness; and a general analysis of the group
 behavior under such a situation will be profitable.

754 When the supposed theft of a man's soul becomes general knowl-
 763 edge, the sustaining social fabric pulls away from the victim. The
 156 familiar attitudes of the kinship personalities change, the collabora-
 tion of the victim and his society, of which his social personality has
 always been an integral part, ceases. The group now acts with all the
 ramifications of its organization and with countless stimuli positively
 to suggest death to a suggestible individual. The ordinary daily activity
 of the victim's social life is removed. The society itself creates a situa-
 tion which, if unchanged, makes it impossible for the individual to
 adjust himself to it even though he tried; and in addition he usually not
 only makes no effort to live and to remain part of his group but ac-
 tually, through the multiple suggestions from it, cooperates in his with-
 drawal therefrom. He becomes what his society's attitudes make him,
 committing a kind of *suicide*. The social configuration in which he
 finds himself operating at this time is one of anomia² for him. His ordi-

² Emile Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, Librairie Felix Alcan, Paris, nouvel edition, 1930. In
 general, anomic suicide is a type supposed to be due to the change in the society which
 surrounds the individual and gives him a feeling of maladjustment and of being
 "lost." The change here, however, is more dynamic than one of process; that is, the
 society as a functioning structure regularly performs this act upon individuals whose
 souls have been stolen, rather than that the society changes in a structural way and
 becomes something different from what it was before and by so doing causes the indi-

A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MAGIC 241

nary social personality is removed, his part of the social structure not only having disintegrated but largely disappeared. Such a man is neither in the world of the ordinary nor in that of the sacred. He is, to use the literal Murngin expression, "half dead." Partly sacred since his soul is not in this world, he is in a position of danger, not only to himself as a spiritual entity, since his soul is neither in this world nor in its proper place in the totemic well, but also to his group, because a soul not properly ritualized and placed in the sacred well with the totemic spirits and sacred ancestors is likely to cause illnesses and death to those near him in kinship. Before death takes place the group, then, begin the mourning ritual the object of which is to transmute the social personality into a spiritual being, that is, to make the soul enter the totem well safely. Even before death the soul starts behaving like the sacred totem; the ancestors and dead relatives come for him and enter his heart; the soul "ceases" reciprocal relations with the profane living, relating itself to the sacred dead; and the living cease acting their everyday rôles and become virtually related to the sacred part of the dying person.

The personality of the victim thus has the ordinary attitudes of society removed from him, the taboo attitude of the sacred being substituted. He responds by recognizing his change of status: the wounded feudist killed by magic dances his totem dance to make himself like his totem and insure his immediate passage to the totem well; the man dying of an illness moves his hands convulsively like his crab totem or flaps his hands like his black duck totem, listening for the sounds of his ancestors' approach as he follows the suggestive sequence of the mourning song and ritual wailingly sung and danced over his body. His effort is not to live but to die.

There are two definite movements of the social group in the process by which black magic becomes effective. In the first movement the community contracts; all the victim's kin withdraw their sustaining support—everyone in his whole community, i.e., all his kin, completely change their attitudes and place him in a new category. He is seen no longer as an ordinary living being like all the other people, but as an abnormal person who is more nearly in the realm of the sacred and taboo. This movement of withdrawal by the society means that his place in the general social fabric has been taken away from him so that he now stands in an entirely different relationship to all of his

vidual to become maladjusted and suicidal. Since this is true, there are in this situation some of the elements of the type Durkheim calls the altruistic type of suicide in which the individual destroys himself because of the perfect working of the society.

754 kin, his clan, and the general tribal grouping. The organization of his
 763 social life has collapsed, and he is alone and isolated.

156 The second movement of the group is its return toward the victim under the integrating force of the mourning rite. The "half dead" man whose soul is in that dangerous position to the community of being neither sacred nor profane must be removed by ritual from any contact with his community; and its purpose now as an organized group with its ceremonial leader, a close relative of the victim's, is finally to cut him off entirely from the ordinary world and ultimately place him in his proper position in the sacred totemic world, that of the dead. The victim, on his part, reciprocates this feeling, behaving in the manner of his totem, with which he attempts to identify himself. The mourning rite is truly a *rite de passage*.

The effect of this double movement, first away from the victim and then back with all the compulsive force of one of the most powerful rituals, is obviously drastic. An analogous situation in our society is hard to imagine. If all a man's near kin, his father, mother, brothers and sisters, wife, children, business associates, friends and all the other members of the society, should suddenly withdraw themselves because of some dramatic circumstance, refusing to take any attitude but one of taboo and looking at the man as one already dead, and then after some little time perform over him a sacred ceremony believed with certainty to guide him out of the land of the living into that of the dead, the enormous suggestive power of this twofold movement of the community after it has had its attitudes crystallized can be somewhat understood by ourselves.

The magicians are the leaders who crystallize this group attitude. By the power of their rituals they organize social opinion and attitudes just as effectively and certainly as the ceremonial leader does by the sacred totemic ritual. Both depend upon the group's participation to make their power effective. It is a group situation, not an individual one, that is operative in both circumstances. It is the power of the "church" or community which integrates the total group, directed by the ceremonial leader in the totemic ceremonies, and it is the power of the church (the clan group) which destroys a man under the guidance and leadership of its magicians.

754 Black magic is a force expressed through the dysphoric condition of an individual member or members of a social group, and an ever present possible danger to all the members of Murngin society.

754 The attitude of the kinsmen of the man they believe to have been
 609

MORTUARY RITES

413

the profane (since he gives an increasing proportion of his time to ritual activities), until finally he returns to where he first originated, the totemic well. 561 771

The father's dream at a child's birth is an expression of the relation of the ordinary to the sacred, since the dream announces a soul's entering the world of the living; and the mortuary ceremony is a ritualization of the relation of the once living soul¹ and also of his mourning kin to the world of the sacred and the dead. The mourning rites symbolize the relationship of these two realms in the beliefs of the Murngin. 771

This chapter will first describe, without interpretation except that of the natives, the mortuary rituals and afterwards present interpretative conclusions. It might be stated that when all the field material which is given here was collected the author had no idea of where the facts led, and it was only by an analysis of the material and by relating it to the rest of the social configuration that the general ideas concerning the aboriginal mourning rites were discovered. 128

II. MURNGIN DEATH, MORTUARY AND MOURNING CEREMONIES AND CUSTOMS

When it is believed that a man is very close to death² his relatives gather about him and wail; some of them, in a plaintive voice, sing the gamma water cycle of songs of his moiety and clan, the leader usually beating time on his singing sticks. The dying man is supposed to listen to these songs and to follow their suggestions; if he cannot understand what is being said, it is believed that the spirit of his marikmo (father's father) or his mari will come when he hears, and talk to the soul which is about to leave the body and instruct it on what it has to do. 763 533

"We sing these songs to make that soul a good one, so he won't hurt any of us." Sometimes when a man has been speared and is still alive a song is sung over him to tell him to die in the proper manner and not allow his soul to make any difficulties for those who are alive. A man who has been badly injured in a spear fight and thinks that he is about to die likes to have this singing because it soothes his pain and removes any worry about the disposition of his soul. "That fellow who has been speared says, 'There is no time for me to live now. I am

¹ All Murngin individuals possess two souls: one (warro) which is from the totem and important, and the other which is a trickster (mokoi). [74]

² See "The Moon and the Parrot Fish," Appendix VIII, Myths, a rather amusing story which accounts for death.

763
533 very close to death. I had better die,' and when that spider song comes he is dead and his soul leaves him."

The songs mean "he thinks of his totem and his totem well and he wants his spirit to go straight to his well when he dies." The man may call out the sound of water or make the cry of his totem. If, for example, a Liaalaomir were near death he would cry out like a python trumpet and "like that snake when he made rain."

As the garma song cycle reaches each totemic element in the sequence, a dying Warumeri clansman is supposed to make motions in imitation of the totemic animal; for example, when the relatives sing whale he kicks to simulate the movement of a whale's body in the sea. This is indicative of his immediate death, of which he is attempting to tell his father and mother. He is becoming like his totem. The father and mother understand the symbol and know then that death is certain. When a man dies he wants the songs of his father and his father's father's people sung into his ears and listened to by his ancestors before he passes away; i.e., he wants the songs of his own clan and his own moiety sung, so that even in death accent is on the patrilineal character of his inheritance and status in life, and the place where he is going and the change in his qualities.

533
763
775 The man goes into a coma. He is dead now, according to Murngin thought, even though the heart still flutters. The relatives notice that it is still moving and although they realize that the life of the body is finished they understand that the grandfather or the mari (mother's mother's brother) is looking out for him. They can tell this because the old ancestor has entered into the heart where the soul of the man has lived during his lifetime. The song cycle now repeats the words about a man going inside the jungle. The heart of the dying man is now ready for this. The soul listens for that song. "It is as though that soul had gone inside the jungle country which belongs to his clan's people. His father's father is taking the soul away." The last quick breaths come and the soul comes out of his heart and out of his windpipe and finally out of his mouth. He is dead.

The song now is to make the soul such a perfect character that he will find his ancestors and go straight to his totem well. "If we didn't sing he might go bad because evil ghosts (mokois) might catch him and take him out in the jungle country where they live. It is better that his old grandfathers and his ancestors come and get him and take him straight to his clan well where his totem came from."

763 Even though the garma song is being sung during a man's dying

MORTUARY RITES

415

moments, there is little organization of the people to give general community expression. A kind of disorganization has occurred. The women wail, but it is not the organized wailing which one finds in some of the rituals. There is a hesitancy and uncertainty about the actions of the people. The more intense latent antagonisms rise to the surface and some of the relatives may be blamed for the death. For example, when a child dies it is often thought that the father and mother have had sexual intercourse during the later months of pregnancy, which are supposed to be a period of abstinence. The other relatives of the dead child express their antagonism by picking up their spears and attempting to throw them at the offending pair. In one sense this is an organized expression, since they well know that they will be prevented by other relatives from throwing the spears. 763 ●

After the first wailing at the news of the spearing or sudden death of a member of the clan or of a near relative, a stillness comes over the camp which is very noticeable to anyone accustomed to the general noisiness of all the Murngin camps after dark when the people have eaten. It is at this quiet time that the people express their desires for revenge. A near relative throws a spear on the ground and lets everyone know that he is going to avenge the death, whether it has been caused by the spear of a known enemy or the black magic of an unknown antagonist. [761
843]

The female relatives of the dead man cut their heads with stone knives or spears or sharp pointed sticks to show their great sorrow. The mothers, sisters, wives, and female maris are the relatives who show the greatest amount of grief and cut themselves the most. A few hours after the death of a man or woman the relatives belonging to his clan, led by the father if he is alive, paint the design of his clan well upon him. For example, if he were a Warumeri or Wangurri clansman he would have the duck well painted upon him. The painting and design are exactly the same as those placed on the body of a young boy when he is being circumcised, and on the body of an adolescent boy after he has seen his totemic emblem. Red ocher is painted all over the body first and then the totemic design is painted on the chest and abdomen and face. The hair is covered with white clay after most of it has been cut off or plucked out to be made into a sacred hair belt. "We pull out the hair of the dead man a few hours after he dies and put red ocher on his head after we do this. We make a hair belt from his hair and look for red parrot feathers to put on it. 764
765
789

THE ABORIGINES OF EAST ARNHEM LAND

Burial and Mourning

Upon the death of a person, especially one of honour and influence, violent expressions of grief are indulged in. The men stand in groups, with spears reversed, with tears streaming down their faces, with the whole body relaxed into a drooping posture, and mournfully chant the death song of their tribe. Meanwhile, the women keep up a dreadful wailing, cut their heads with flints, shells, or sticks until the blood pours down their naked bodies, and throw themselves upon the ground in an utter abandonment of grief. These performances are repeated several times over, especially if fresh parties arrive at the camping ground. 152 763

Before the body is disposed of, there is painted upon it the totemic design of the horde to which the deceased belonged, and to the spirit or totemic centre of which the soul of the departed is believed to return. The body is disposed of either by interment in the ground or by being placed upon a platform constructed for the purpose. 764

In either case, after the body has decomposed, the bones are recovered by male relatives and painted with red ochre. A ceremony is then held, during which the bones are handed over to the female relatives of the deceased, and by them are carried about, sometimes for several years. For this purpose a cylinder of bark is constructed, which is also painted with the person's totemic symbols. Finally, another elaborate ceremony is held, when the bones are broken and deposited in a tall hollow post, which is planted upright in the ground at any convenient place. 765

While the body is awaiting burial, certain near male relatives of the deceased make in the ground a representation of the particular totemic centre, and there ceremonially partake of food, which is known as "Wukandi." None of this food must be given to outsiders, nor must these men partake of food elsewhere. In this way they enter into communion with their departed brother, who is believed to be present with them in these ceremonial meals. 764

Shortly after the disposal of the body, the near relatives of the deceased pass through a purification ceremony, known as "Wontjurr," during which they are washed in a representation of the pool which constitutes the totemic or spirit centre of their 764 783

YULENGOR

784 safe for everyone to use. But the influence of the totem on
 775 the cylinder still remained in the axe, and it could therefore
 765 be used only by near relatives. To overcome this, Yama cut
 778 a canoe, thereby transferring the totemic influences to it.
 222 The dug-out was 'de-ghosted' in much the same way as if it
 783 had carried the actual bones; fish caught from it were
 ceremonially eaten, and it was switched with smoking twigs
 to drive off the tabu.

224 'Ghostly' help is freely sought by hunters to assist them
 775 in their search for food. It is generally accepted that if the
 ghost, or mali, of a dead man is harnessed it will assist in the
 hunt by rounding up fish, birds, or animals. A ghost dims
 the eyes of the game so they cannot see clearly, blocks their
 ears so they cannot hear the hunter, and plays such havoc
 with their noses that he is unrecognizable.

224 To obtain the assistance of such a ghost, a hunter must
 775 carry a 'maiwola' or small piece of bone, hair, skin, or
 778 blood from the corpse. Small bones, hair, or other parts of a
 765 body, may be had for the asking when a corpse is being
 064 dismembered in any normal burial ceremony, and these
 'hunting-charms' are wrapped in bark and hung round the
 neck. The ghost, or mali, lurks near its skeleton and, as in
 the instance of a skeleton carried in a canoe, exerts influence
 over it and all that it touches. But when a hunter carries
 a piece of the body as a charm, he is able to control the
 ghost so that it does his bidding, and when he is hunting the
 ghost follows the charm. If it happens that several men
 have obtained charms from the same corpse, and in different
 parts of the country go hunting at the same time, the ghost
 will serve one and then hurry off to help another. This
 explains why charms are not always effective, for if a hunter
 catches nothing, that is because the ghost is otherwise
 engaged, or is away lurking by the main part of its skeleton,
 which is wrapped in bark and carried by a tribal mother.

775 Any strange event can be readily explained by attributing
 763

JUNGLE LORE AND ETIQUETTE

it to invisible wandering ghosts. They haunt old scenes 775
after death, and the signs of their whereabouts are easily 763●
recognized from their mischievous habits. Burrumurra was
our interpreter and spent a lot of time with us, and one day, [24]
when he went 'walk-about', a ghost hid his dinner. He had
found a nest of turtle eggs and covered them with sand [222]
whilst he went for oysters; on his return it seemed that some
of the eggs had disappeared, and when he had searched in
vain for Yulengor footprints he naturally concluded that some
mali had been at work. Two weeks later he heard that a
relative had died, and thereupon concluded that the mali
of the dead relative had taken the eggs to show that he was
a spirit and no longer in the flesh.

Jirring was the best-built and most attractive warrior I
have ever seen. He was tall and powerful, yet he burst into
my camp one night and agitatedly stammered: 'Ngarakala
gurapan bureiala, bukorjulni'—in other words: 'Please give
me a lantern.' When I asked him why he wanted it, he said
that a mali had run over his chest and wakened him, and
he was convinced that it was the ghost of his father, who was
away visiting in a distant horde. I had seen his father only
a few days previously, so I told him that he must have been
dreaming, but he was morbidly confident that his father had
been killed and that his spirit had returned with the news.
Nor could Jirring be convinced otherwise, until his father
returned to camp and he both saw and touched him.

On another occasion, on our way back to Yirrkala after
midnight, several men and I were filing along a bush track
and saw fires on a hillside. I imagined they were the
smouldering remains of recent bush-fires, but no such simple
explanation occurred to the nomads, who immediately
lowered their voices and questioningly murmured to each
other: 'Mali? Mali?' On arrival at the station we saw that
something was amiss, for the whole camp was wailing and
singing. We were told that a raid had been made over one

YULENGOR

775
763

hundred miles away, and it was thought that two Yirrkala men had been killed. The men who were with me immediately supported the tidings with the evidence of the fires in the bush, that had obviously been lit by the mali of the dead men, who had travelled the hundred miles to inform their friends.

775

Unexpected and distant smoke is at times considered to come from mali camp-fires. Without consciously contradicting the statement that mali are spirits, Yulengor complacently attribute unrecognizable footprints and other physical functions to them. An unknown canoe carried in on the tide or found on an island is accepted as having been used by mali when hunting or fishing.

562
881

Women have been assigned a very inferior place in aboriginal society, and it almost seems that they attend some ceremonies to focus attention on the men. But at least one ceremony is carried out entirely by women, at the coming of a first menstrual period.

[285]
[302]

A young wife, on recognizing the menarche, informs her mother, who then forbids her to leave her windbreak. Food and water are brought to her, and most likely she will curl up in her 'nganmurra', or cone-shaped mat, till she recovers. She is painted with two bands of clay below the shoulders, and red, yellow, and white vertical lines are made between these bands. Whenever menstruation recurs,

362
841
[302]

women smear themselves with ochre and painstakingly abstain from eating men's food. Dugong, turtle, fish, and birds are regarded as men's food, and men are expected to

[462]

spear them; women content themselves with collecting yams, roots, and shellfish. With undisguised chagrin, a wife in this temporary quarantine will sit with her husband and his wives round the camp-fire, painted red and with her back turned, and will nibble a yam or shellfish whilst the family consume turtle, kangaroo, or fish.

ABORIGINAL TEMPERAMENT

of the hordes sit apprehensively under shady trees whilst the men paint intricate totemic designs on the initiates. More often than not several hordes meet for the occasion, and all the boys between eight and ten years of age are prepared by relatives. Armlets, dilly-bags and trinkets are hung around their necks for decorative purposes, and sometimes they carry a knife or steel tomahawk. When their moment arrives, the boys are brought to the ceremonial ground, and the men dance and sing with increasing emotion, till at last they bunch together and with kindly reluctant movements force each boy into the arms of a crouching man who supports and holds him. Women relatives close in and dance around the tightly packed circle and wail in rising agitation, others gash their heads, and girl playmates of the initiates cry amongst the trees and cut their breasts with sharp shells. An invitation is often extended to a visiting Yulengor to perform the actual operation, which is frequently prolonged by the use of a stone knife or spearhead. The loud purposeful calls of the men seldom drown the cries of the victim. It is then that a wave of emotion sweeps over the entire camp.

When a nomad is sick the relatives will crouch tightly around him, and their excessively mournful sympathy is conducive to moans and vapours from the patient. Eye-rolling and groans will accompany even simple sprains and abdominal pains and inspire sympathetic cries and wails. At the approach of death, the next of kin draw near pathetically brushing flies from the patient, attempting to sustain warmth with sheets of paper-bark, but unwittingly stifling him in a turgid atmosphere. There are wails and shrieks if continuous movement is not seen from some part of the body. Commotion at death is indescribable; women deliberately hurl themselves on the ground with loud cries, and they wail loudly and tremulously as they stab their heads with sharp stones and shells.

Egyptians preserved mummified bodies in pyramids, 000

BURIAL RITES AND CANNIBALISM

given to relatives, and by accepting them they pledge themselves to avenge the death of their kinsman. Bones are also worn as hunting-charms; the ghost follows the bone and guides the wearer to good hunting. Skeletons carried in canoes or sheltered in huts transfer their ghost to anything they touch, and rarely are they allowed to come into contact with private property. 765 [789] [775]

Tabus are lifted by switching away the ghost with smoking twigs. This common 'muntja' ceremony is performed whenever news of a death reaches a camp, perhaps months after it has occurred, otherwise the roaming, mischievous ghost might haunt them indefinitely. Men are most particular in taking part in the ghost-laying practices, otherwise the ghost would trail them when hunting, and as animals can see these spirits it would not be possible to stalk and spear game. 784 775 765 [825]

An accepted etiquette is observed in breaking news of death. With an air of mystery the messenger imparts his information to two or three of the older men, and often it is ten or twelve hours before they divulge the news in open camp. I saw a man bring such news and tell it by signs to a few old men who agreed to keep the secret till they arranged the ghost-placating ceremony, and no one heard about it till the coterie commenced to sing for the unmistakable 'muntja'. Performers then derived great satisfaction from the furore; the rest of the camp ran to inquire about the death and to join in the laying of the ghost. 763 [201]

Dead nomads' names are never repeated, though reference to them can be made by signs or by relationship terms. If the restless ghost heard its old familiar name it would probably lodge in the camp or in the body of the person using it. A nomad with a dead man's name will change it or be referred to under a class-name. A little girl, Milly-milly, had her euphonious name changed to Arrung-giddy-niddy after the death of an older Milly-milly. The child appreciated 551 [775]

SUN AND MORNING STAR

cripple and soon weakened. He told his brother that he could not go any farther, and calmly preparing to go down he gave away his one and only valuable possession: 'When you get ashore, you can have my tomahawk,' he said. With the usual aboriginal courage, loyalty, and determination, the older man returned to his brother, and by keeping him afloat, and making use of tide and waves, they were washed ashore in an exhausted state on the sandy island, where they remained three days without water or shade. At the end of that time they made a smoke-fire from a wood-drill and drift-wood, and they were rescued by friends from the mainland, who came to see why the brothers were camping on the island. 165
502
[763] •
[577]

We were walking along one of the open-sea beaches when an old man told me the tale of the nautilus shell. He said in effect: 'We call it a moon-shell.' I asked what it had to do with the moon, and was told that the old moon dies once a month and throws this, his skeleton, into the sea. The moon dies, and after the lapse of a few days his spirit is reincarnated and appears as a new moon. I began to understand then why a nomad on seeing a new moon joyfully shouts the news to the camp. Men, women, and children rejoice together as over the return of a long-absent friend. 773 *
821

A long time ago a man camped beside a lagoon in the mountains. Life had dealt kindly with him, but in spite of his pleasant surroundings and good food supply he wanted to live in the sky. At night the Evening Star tantalizingly twinkled in the rippling lagoon, till the man could stand it no longer, so he climbed into the sky. His plan had been carefully thought out: 'I will live with the stars and outshine them till I am an old man, and when I die I will put my spirit in a new body.'

'Ngalindi' goes through this cycle every lunar month, and